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PORTSMOUTH – AS OTHERS HAVE SEEN IT

PART I 1540-1790

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Margaret J. Hoad, MA

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history Portsmouth has seen the comings and goings of many people from kings and queens down to the humblest soldiers and sailors and their camp followers. From Saxon times at least there was quite a community settled round the area now known as Old Portsmouth and the Camber. For some reason Portsmouth, in spite of its excellent harbour, never attracted a large merchant class to settle here. Perhaps the nearness and dominance of Southampton with its easier access to the seats of government at Winchester and London had something to do with this. Perhaps, too, the fact that Portsmouth was on an island, and a rather marshy one at that, without a bridge to the mainland till some unknown date well into the Middle Ages, had also something to do with it. Thus throughout the Middle Ages it remained a very small place, but it may have suited the kings of England that Portsmouth was not a trading centre, for from 1100 onwards it was regularly used as an assembly point for troops embarking on expeditions to France. From time to time therefore the town saw great influxes of people though they never stayed for any length of time. Here too came many a king, from Henry I on, to join his army. Eventually Henry VII decided to build again in this quiet place a royal dockyard and storehouses and from then on Portsmouth became an increasingly important naval and military base.

Not until Tudor times did any visitor write an account of his stay which has survived down to present times. It might be assumed that many of the written accounts would be by soldiers or sailors, but this is not so. In many cases they obviously became so familiar with the place that they ceased to comment on their surroundings. Certainly any mention they make of Portsmouth is usually very cursory. The majority of the following extracts are therefore written by those who were new to the town and who made only a brief visit. Some, like Pepys and John Wesley, came solely for business reasons. Others came for personal interest or amusement.

The accounts may thus be said to fall into several different categories. First, there are those like Leland and Camden who were trying to make a descriptive survey of a country at that time largely unknown. Then there are those like Defoe who wrote about their travels with an eye to publication right from the start. Finally there are those like Samuel Pepys who wrote a purely personal account which he never intended should be read by the general public.

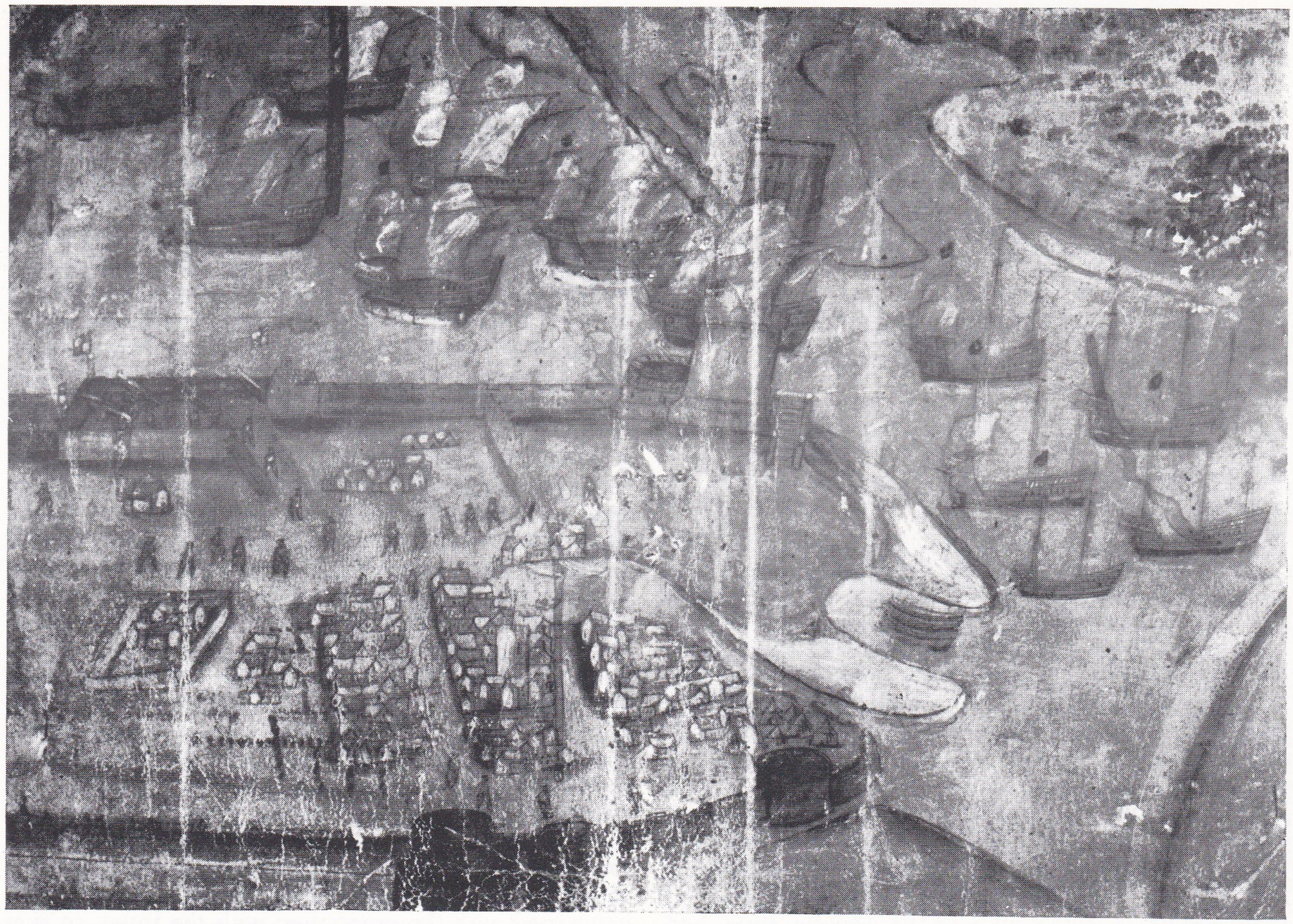
As it happens all the extracts quoted in this paper have been printed at some time or other, though many are now difficult to obtain. All are contemporary accounts, written at the time of the writer's visit, as it is felt that these would reveal aspects which the permanent inhabitant would take for granted. Descriptions of the town made years after a visit have not been included as the passage of time may have made the memory faulty. Obviously it is not possible to include all accounts but as good a cross-section as possible has been sought from the Tudor period on. No attempt has been made to seek out descriptions of occasions when Portsmouth may be said to have hit the national headlines, as when the Duke of Buckingham was murdered in 1628 or when the *Royal George* was sunk in 1782. These are more concerned with the event than with the town, so that what has been sought are eye-witness accounts describing the town and the life of its people. From them will be seen how the town and naval dockyard gradually grew and increased in size and importance, what aspects attracted and interested different visitors and how often these reflected the history of Portsmouth. Finally, it should be noted that many of the extracts included here have been cut to some extent. This has been done to avoid unnecessary repetition and to reduce the excessive wordiness of some of the writers.

The spelling and punctuation of the extracts are as in the original.

Square brackets denote a modern insertion but round ones are those of the original writer.

. . . denotes a passage omitted by the present compiler from the original.

Portsmouth in the middle of the sixteenth century (although somewhat imperfect, this shows the considerable extent of open ground within the walls).



By courtesy of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Ref. MS Gough Drawing a. 4 fol. 19.)

The first to have left a notable description of Portsmouth is *John Leland*. He travelled extensively between the years 1535 and 1545. At first he had been encouraged by Henry VIII to survey the books in monastic libraries, but from 1539 he travelled mainly for topographical and antiquarian reasons and this bias comes out clearly in his journal. As he travelled round, he kept roughish diaries which were never fully written up, but it is thought he visited Portsmouth around 1540.

He came to the town by way of Titchfield and Gosport and so he describes first the creeks on the western side of Portsmouth Harbour. He then goes on to say:

'There is at this [east] point of the haven Portesmuth toun, and a great round tourre almost doble in quantite and strenkith to that that is on the west side of the haven right agayn it: and heere is a might[y] chaine of yren to draw from tourre to towre.

About a quarter of a mile above this tower is a great dok for shippes, and yn this dok lyith yet part of the rybbes of the *Henry Grace of Dieu*, one of the biggest shippes that hath beene made [in the memory of man].[1]

[1] The original phrase is in Latin.

There be above this dok 2 crekes in this part of the haven.

The castelle of Portchester standith a 3 miles by water from Portesmuth toune.

The towne of Portesmuth is murid[1] from the est tour a forowgh[2] lenght with a mudde waulle armid with tymbre, wher on be great peaces both of yren and brasen ordinauns, and this peace of the waulle having a diche without it rennith so far flat south south est, and is the place most apte to defende the town ther open on the haven.

Then rennith a dich almost flat est for a space: and withyn it is a waulle of mudde lyke to the other: and so thens goith round aboute the toun to the circuite of a myle.

There is a gate of tymbre at the north est ende of the town: and by it is cast up an hille of erth dichid; wherin be gunnes to defende entre into the toun by land.

There is much vacant ground within the toun waulle.

There is one fair streate in the toun from west to north este.

There is but one paroche chirch in the town.

There is a chapelle in a vacant ground (in the southe weste syde of the town toward the waulle and shore).[3]

There is also in the west south west part of the toun a fair hospitale[4] sumtyme erectid by Petrus de Rupibus Bisshop of Winchester, wheryn were a late xij poore men, and yet vj be yn it.

I lernid in the toun that the 2 towers in the haven mouth were begon in King Edwarde the 4 tyme, and sette forewarde yn building by Richard the 3. Kyng Henry the vij endyd them at the procuration of Fox Bisshop of Winchester.[5]

King Henry the vij at his firste warres into Fraunce erectid in the south part of the towne 3 great bruing houses with the implementes to serve his shippes at such tyme as they shaul go to the se in tyme of warre.

One Carpenter a riche man made of late tyme in the mydle of the high streate of the town a town house.[6]

The toun of Portesmouth is bare and litle occupied in time of pece.

King Henry the vij of late tyme sette in Portesmuth capitaines, and certen soldiours in garnison.

The town of Portesmuth standith in a corner of an isle bering the name of Portesmuth.

This isle is in lenght a vj miles and a 3 myles in bredth. . . .

The ground within the isle of Portesmuth is partly enclosid, fruteful of corn and hath sum wood.

From Portesmuth toun to Portesbridge of 2 arches of stone ij mjles.

This bridge is the limes[7] of the isle.

And heere I markid one arme of salte water ebbing and flowing that cummith owt of Portesmuth Haven up by marsch ground onto Portebridge. And an other creke t[hens] from the mayne se to the same bridge. And these 2 crekes meting at the bridge make the Isle of Portesmuthe.'

Leland obviously came to Portsmouth before the building of Southsea Castle around 1544, for he makes no reference to it. However when *Edward VI* came here a few years later in August 1552 while on a tour of the south coast, he was not too pleased with the state of the defences as he relates in both his *Journal* and in a candid letter to his friend Barnaby Fitzpatric. To Fitzpatric he says:

'From thens we went to Pourtismouthe toune, and there viewed not only the toune itself, and the Haven, but also divers Bulwarkes, as Chatertons,[8] Haselford[9], with other. In viewing of which we find the Bulwarkes chargeable, massie, well rampared, but il facioned, il flanked, and set in unmete places, the toune weake in comparison of that it ought to be, though great (for within the walls ar faire and large closis and much vacant rome) the haven notable great and standing by Nature easy to be fortefied, and for the more strenght thereof we have devised two strong castellis on either side of the Have[n] at the mouth thereof. For at the mouth of the Have[n] is not past ten score over, but in the middle almost a mile over, and in lenght for a mile and a hauf hable to beare the greatest ship in Christendome.'

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[1] i.e. walled.
[2] i.e. furrow.
[3] This chantry chapel to Adam Moleyns, Bishop of Chichester, between God's House and Square Tower, was ordered to be built as part of the penance of the town in 1508 for his murder. By 1547 after the dissolution it was used as a storehouse.
[4] Domus Dei, God's House.
[5] These towers, Round Tower and a fort on the Gosport side, were built before Edward IV's reign, probably about 1418–26.
[6] The first Guildhall.
[7] i.e. boundary.
[8] Chaterton's Bulwark, also known as Green Bulwark, at southernmost point of town defences. It is not to be confused with Southsea Castle, where Edward VI spent the night, which was also known as Chaterton's Castle.
[9] Fort built on site of Haslar Hospital, Gosport.

View of Portsmouth and Gosport from St. Helens, c. 1710. In spite of the faulty perspective, this brings out the importance of St. Thomas's as a watch tower.

Edward VI's *Journal* is more precise as to his activities and plans:

> 'In the morning I went to Chaterton's Bulwarke, and vewed also the Toune; at afternoune went to see the Store-house, and then toke a bote, and went to the wodden toure and so to Haselford. Upon viewing of wich things ther was devised tow fortes to be made upon the entry of the haven: one where Ridleis toure[1] standeth, upon the neke that maketh the Camber; the other upon a like neke, standing on tother side of the haven where stode an old bulwarke of wode. This was devised for the strenght of the haven. It was meant that that to toune side should be both stronger and larger.'

In actual fact nothing was done to improve the harbour defences before Edward died almost a year later and under his sister, Queen Mary, the defence situation actually became worse, for at the instigation of her husband, Philip of Spain, the Haslar fort was pulled down. Not till Queen Elizabeth I's reign were steps taken over a number of years to rebuild the town's fortifications, a fact which is commented upon by *William Camden* when in 1586 he first published in Latin the results of his ten-year survey of the British Isles called *Britannia*. It would seem from the way Camden expresses himself that he had a copy of Leland's *Itinerary* at hand when he wrote his own comments. In their turn, later writers are often found quoting Camden.

Like Leland, Camden approached Portsmouth from Titchfield: 'Thence [i.e. near to Titchfield] the shore winds inwards, and the island Portsey forms a bay, in whose inmost recess antiently stood Port Peris . . . Our ancestors gave it the new name of Portchester. . . . Here remains a large castle, which commands the harbour below. But the gradual withdrawing of the sea having rendered this harbour less commodious, the inhabitants removed to the adjacent island of Portsey, which is fourteen miles round, encompassed in flood tides by the sea, of which they make salt.[2] This island joins to the main land by a bridge, which has a fort adjoining. . . . At the mouth of the harbour our ancestors built a town, which they called from thence Portsmouth. In war time it is much frequented, at other times scarce at all; the inhabitants being more attentive to war and navigation than to trade. It has a handsome church, and an hospital called God's house, founded by Peter de Rupibus bishop of Winchester. The town was antiently defended by a wall of timber covered with earth, a bastion to the north-east near the gate, and two forts of hewn stone at the mouth of the harbour, begun by Edward IV and finished by Henry VII who placed a garrison here according to the account of the inhabitants. But in our time queen Elizabeth at great expence fortified it so strongly with new works, that nothing is wanting to make it a place of the greatest strength. Some of the garrison mount guard night and day at the gates, others in the steeple [of St. Thomas], who, by the strokes of the bell give notice what number of horse and foot are approaching, and by a flag shew which way they come.'

Camden's references to the warning bell on St Thomas's Church and to the guard kept at the gates are mentioned again by other people not only in the seventeenth century but also well into the eighteenth.

One of the next visitors who left a record is a *Lieutenant Hammond* from Norwich who made a tour of the south in the late summer of 1635, continuing by himself a tour of the country he had started the previous year with two companions. Travelling from Chichester he says:

> 'I on to Portsmouth; and upon that high Downe[3], I breath'd, and tooke fresh ayre both from Sea and Land, especially at S[r]. [blank] Nortons Windmill[4] which commaunds a most gallant prospect every way round about. There descended I downe for Portsmouth, and so over a Bridge, some 2 mile from the Towne in a high way Sea . . . and as I pass'd by, I espy'd a wofull Spectacle, which was the bones of that unfortunate Felton, hanging neere by in Chaines for his treacherous fact, in giving the Duke a fatall stroke.[5]
>
> I am now got to Portsmouth, and by a toll of the Bell from the watch Tower on the top of the steeple[6], I was thereupon stopt and examin'd by a Sentinell at the Port, entring this strong Garison Mayor Towne, what I was, and from whence I came? I told him truly as it was, both my qualitie, and that I came from good Companie, good mirth, good cheere, and good Wine: All which would

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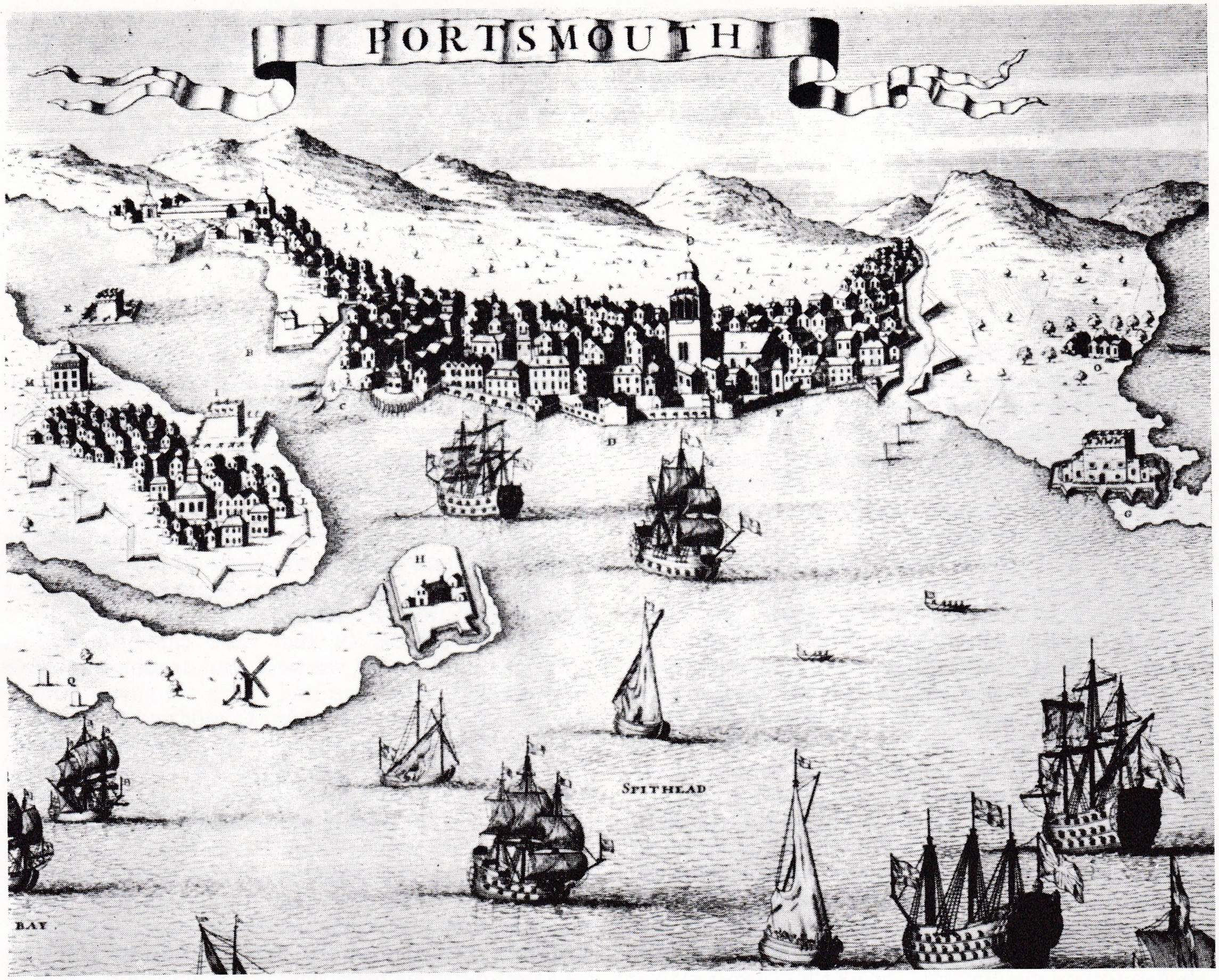
[1] Ridley's Tower, otherwise Round Tower.
[2] The principal salterns were on the east side of Portsea Island. The industry was flourishing in the eighteenth century and survives in the place-name Great Salterns.
[3] Portsdown.
[4] On the site of the present Fort Widley.
[5] The Duke of Buckingham. Felton's body was hung near the present Clarence Pier.
[6] On St. Thomas' Church. Because of its use as a watch-tower, it was severely damaged by the besieging Parliamentary army in the Civil Wars. It ceased to be used as a watch-tower some time after 1727.



By courtesy of the British Museum. (*Ref. XIV*/42*b*.)

not make a good passe, till I further told my Examiner my designes; and having done soe, I told him that I desir'd to be quarter'd in a good Inn for the time I stay'd, which by his good directions I soone obtayn'd.

So on I went as I was directed to my Inn, which was the red Lion, where my Name was not inroll'd, because I stay'd nott there all night. My Hostesse there was briske, blith and merry, a hansome sprightly Lasse, fit for the company of brave Commaunders: whereof there are good store, both within that Garrison Towne and the Castles there neere adioyning; On my right hand beyond the Docke, 2 Mile from Portsmouth, I left one;[1] And on the other side on my left hand close to the maine Sea I left another.[2]

As soone as I lighted, I presently went to the Cheife place in this Garison Towne,[3] where att that time was the Cheife Governor[4] thereof and his Deputy; but the generous Commaunder I had my passe to, was not then there; yet that small time I stay'd there, I happen'd to meet with an honest Blade, my Countryman and Acquaintance,[5] who was as glad to see me as I was to see him there.

Time was precious with me, and having none to spare for Complement, therefor after a hearty salute onely enterchang'd we quickly march'd downe togeather with his Lordships Chaplain and Steward, into his Honors Wine-Celler, and there nimbly took off 2 or 3 heartie glasses of excellent choice Wine, which enabled me the better to march the Rounds, and encourag'd me the livelier to visit the Quarters of their Randevouz.

As soone as we were mounted the walls (where no stranger is admitted to passe withowt his Guard) The stately Ship, the *Swallow*, tooke her flight close by us, with swift wing and full Sayle, and 206 men in her; when she was right against the Fort, she vayl'd her Topsayle, and discharg'd halfe a dozen great Guns for her parting Salute; The Officers straightway from the Fort requited her with three Peeces of Ordinance for a like parting Volley:

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[1] Portchester Castle.
[2] Southsea Castle.
[3] Godshouse.
[4] Lord Wimbleton, Governor; Capt. Bret, Deputy.
[5] Serjeant-Major Heigham.

The Seymour Salt, presented by the Corporation to Queen Catherine of Braganza on her arrival in England for her marriage to Charles II on 22nd May 1662.

at the same time there pass'd another goodly Ship, the *Harry*, soone after the other, with the like vayling Posture, and receiving the like farewell Salute from the Fort for her Foy.

The Maine Sea beats upon the Square Tower, which is close to that Fort, where all the Ammunition is kept, on the top whereof is mounted many goodly Peeces of Ordinance.

After I had march'd the Rounds, quarter'd the Streets, and offer'd up my devotions at Godshouse in their faire Chappell there, where the brave Commaunders and Garison Soldiers receive Provision for their Soules; The King's long store house or Magazine, where Provisions is layd in for their Bodies, I made haste to a new place then in my sight, which was about 6 or 7 Mile off,[1] . . . for the Wind and Tide stayes for no man, and my Boatmen call'd earnestly on me to hasten away.

Being thus forc'd away, I then tooke a short leave of the Maior, and shooke hands with my honest Countryman, and so did commit my selfe to the blustring Winds, and rowling Waves with these my Sea-Pilotts, who were so unfit for that passage at that time that quickly both they, and I, began to be sicke thereof; for by that time they had row'd a mile, the Wind did soe rise, and the waves did soe tosse us, that we made all speed possibly wee could to the shore, which was not amisse, although those churlish, drunken Sotts mutter'd: For what with the tempesteousnesse of the weather, that made the sea so boysterous and swelling: what with the unrulinesse of my Horse; the smalnesse of the Boat; and the lightheadinesse of my Rowers, it was wisdome to get off that great danger; And so being soundly drench'd, (with some difficulty) we cast Anchor in the quavering Beech, and Sands, where they left mee beetweene wind, and weather to march 3 or 4 miles a desperate way to Hell-head,[2] whither they could not row me over till 10 of the Clocks at night. In the interim, for that I must there spend my time, and endanger my selfe, with a Company of Sharkes, that drunke like Fishes, and then have them along for my fellow Travellers: For these reasons I de[c]lin'd going to the Ile of Wight at that time, and to alter my intended course, to goe to Tichfeild, where I rested, and slept soundly, after my tossing, and wet journey.'

Others recount similar harrowing experiences in trying to cross to the Isle of Wight but *Samuel Pepys* never went that far. He first came to Portsmouth in May 1661 with his wife and of course wrote of his visit in his diary.

'May 1. Up early and baited at Petersfield, in the room which the King lay in lately at his being there.[3]

Here very merry and played, us and our wifes, at bowles. Then we set forth again; and so to portsmouth, seeming to me a very pleasant and strong place. And we lay at the Red lyon, where Haslerigg and Scott and Walton[4] did hold their Council when they were here, against Lambert and the Committee of safety.

Several officers of the Yard came to see us tonight; and merry we were, but troubled to have no better Lodgeings.

[May] 2. Up; and Mr. Creed and I to walk round the town upon the Walls. Then to our Inne; and there all the officers of the Yard to see me with great respect and I walked with them to the Dock and saw all the Stores, and much pleased with the sight of the place.

Back, and brought them all to dinner with me and treated them handsomely; and so after dinner by water to the Yard, and there we made the Sale of the old provisions. Then we and our wifes all to see the *Mountagu*, which is a fine ship. And so to the towne again by water; and then to see the room where the Duke of Buckingham was killed by Felton.

So to our lodgings and to supper and to bed. . . .

[May] 3. earely to walk with Mr. Creed up and down the Towne; and it was in his and some others' thoughts to have got me made free of the towne; but the Mayor was it seems unwilling, and so they could not do it.

Then to the pay-house and there paid off the ship. And so to a short dinner and then took Coach . . . to Petersfield.'

Almost a year later Pepys came again to Portsmouth when the arrival of Catherine of Braganza to marry Charles II was daily expected, but this time he came

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[1] Isle of Wight.
[2] Hill Head, near Lee-on-Solent.
[3] On 4–5 January 1661, when he travelled with his mother and sister Henrietta as far as Portsmouth on their way to France.
[4] In December 1659, when these republicans took action against the Commonwealth Army leaders under Lambert, won over the garrison troops of Portsmouth and others sent against them, and prepared the way for Monck's march from Scotland. (See Portsmouth Paper No. 11 – *Portsmouth and the Fall of the Puritan Republic*, by D. Dymond.) The old Red Lion inn was on the corner of High St and Church Lane.

By courtesy of The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, London.

without his wife. As before, he gives little description of Portsmouth in his diary but he does give some insight into the life and behaviour of people of standing in the town. Almost as an afterthought he mentions that he was made a burgess of the borough.

[April 23] 'The Doctor[1] and I lay together at Wiards the Chyrurgeons in Portsmouth – his wife a very pretty woman. We lay very well and merrily. In the morning, concluding him to be of the eldest blood and house of the Clerkes, because that all the fleas came to him and not to me.

[April 24] Up and to Sir George Carterets lodging at Mrs. Stephens, where we keep our table all the time we are here. Thence all of us to the pay-house; but the books not being ready, we went to church to the Lecture. . . .

No news of the Queene at all. So to dinner and then to the pay all the afternoon. . . .

[April] 25. All the morning at Portsmouth at the pay; and then to dinner and again to the pay; . . . I was much troubled in my eyes, by reason of the healths I have this day been forced to drink. . . .

[April] 27. Sunday. . . . I rode to church and met my Lord Chamberlaine[2] upon the walls of the Garrison, who owned and spoke to me. I followed him in the Crowde of gallants through the Queenes lodgings to Chappell; the rooms being all rarely furnished – and escaped hardly being set on fire yesterday.[3] At Chappell we had a most excellent and eloquent sermon. . . . After dinner, Sir W. Penn and I, the Doctor, and Ned Pickering by coach to the Yard; and there, on board the *Swallow* in the Dock, hear our Navy Chaplin preach a sad sermon, full of nonsense and false Latin. . . . And so we four back again by coach to Portsmouth, and there visited the Mayor, Mr. Timbrell our Anchorsmith, who showed us the present they have

[1] Dr. Timothy Clarke, Physician to the King's Household.
[2] Earl of Manchester, a distant relative of Pepys by marriage.
[3] Lodgings had been prepared for Catherine of Braganza in Government House ('God's House'), residence of the Governor.

for the Queene; which is a salt-sellar of silver, the walls Christall, with four Eagles and four grey-hounds standing up at top to bear up a dish – which endeed is one of the neatest pieces of plate that ever I saw – and the case is very pretty also.[1]

This evening came a Merchantman in the harbour, which we hired at London to carry horse to Portugall; but Lord, what running there was to the seaside to hear what news, thinking it had come from the Queene. In the evening, Sir George, Sir W. Penn and I walked round the walls; and thence we two with the Doctor to the yard; and so to supper and to bed.

[April] 29. . . . And after our work was done, Sir G. Carteret, Sir W. Penn and I walked forth, and I spied Mrs. Pierce and another lady passing by; so I left them and went to the ladies, and walked with them up and down and took them to Mrs. Stephens's, and there give them wine and sweet-meats and were very merry; and then comes the Doctor and we carried them by coach to their lodging; which was very poor, but the best they could get and such as made much mirth among us. So I appointed one to watch when the gates of the towne were ready to be shut and to give us notice; and so the Doctor and I stayed with them, playing and laughing; and at last was forced to bid good-night, for fear of being locked into the towne all night. So we walked to the yard. . . .

[April] 30. This morning Sir G came down to the yard, and there we mustered over all the men and determined of some regulacions in the yard. And then to dinner, all the officers of the yard with us; and after dinner walk to Portsmouth – there to pay off the *Successe*, which we did pretty earely . . . I went to the ladies . . . and we very merry, playing at cards . . . till 12 o'clock at night. . . . And so passed the guards and went to the Doctor's lodgings, and there lay with him. . . . So to sleep in a bad bed, about one a-clock in the morning.

This afternoon, after dinner, comes Mr. Stephenton, one of the Burgeses of the towne, to tell me that the Mayor and burgesses did desire my acceptance of a Burgessshipp and were ready at the Mayor['s] to make me one. So I went and there they were all ready and did with much civility give me my oath; and after the oath, did by custom shake me all by the hand. So I took them to a taverne and made them drink; and paying the reckoning, went away – they having first in the taverne made Mr. Waith also a burgesse, he coming in while we were drinking. It cost me a piece in gold to the Towne Clerke and 10s to the bayliffes, and spent 6s.'

The next day Pepys left Portsmouth. He was not to come again to Portsmouth till 1685 when he accompanied James II on his tour to inspect the new fortifications being built there to the plan of Sir Bernard de Gomme. However, it is in the diary of *John Evelyn* who travelled with Pepys that an account of this visit is to be found.

'[Sept] 17 Early next morning we went to Portsmouth, some thing before his Majestie arived: we found all the way full of people, the Women in their best dresse, multitudes of all sorts, in expectance of seeing his Majestie passe by, which he did, riding on horse-back, a good part of the way: We found the Mayor, his Alderman with their Mace, & in their formalities standing at the Entrance of the Fort, a Mile on this side the Towne, where he made a speech to the King, & then went off the Guns of the fort, as did all those of the Garison, so soone as he was come into Portsmouth, all the souldiers (which were neere 3000) drawn up, and lining the streetes, & platforme to Gods-house (which is the name of the Governors house) where (after his Majestie had viewed the new Fortifications, & Ship-yard) he was Entertained at a Magnificent dinner, by Sir [Henry] Slingsby, the Lieutenant Governor; all the Gent: of any quality, in his traine setting downe at Table with him, & which I also had don, had I not ben before engag'd to Sir Robert Holmes (Governor of the Isle of Wight) to dine with him at a private house, where likewise we had a very sumptuous & plentifull repast of excellent Venison, Fowle, Fish, fruit, & what not: After dinner I went to waite on his Majestie againe, who was pulling on his boots in the Towne hall joyning to the house where he dined, & then having saluted some Ladys &c: that came to kisse his hand; he tooke horse for Winchester, whither he returned that night: This hall is artificialy hung round, with Armes of all sorts, like the Hall & keepe of Windsor, which looks very finely.

I went hence to see the Ship-yard, & Dock, the Fortifications, and other things; What I learned was, the facility of an armies taking the Ile of

[1] See illustration on page 9. Now known as the Seymour Salt, it is 10½ ins. high and the body is of rock crystal framed in silver gilt. The case is now missing. When Queen Catherine returned to Portugal in 1692, it passed into the possession of Sir Thomas Seymour, who in 1693 was excused from serving as Touchwarden of the Goldsmith's Company in London in exchange for presenting the Company with this Salt.

Wight, should an attempt be made by any Enemy, for want of due care in fortifying some places of it, & the plenty of the Iland, able to nourish 20000 men, besides its inhabitants. Portsmouth when finished will be very strong, & a Noble Key: There were now 32 Men of war in the Harbour: I was invited by Sir R: Beach, the (Commissioner) where after a greate supper, Mr. Secretary [Pepys] and my selfe lay-all that night: & the next morning set out for Gildford.'

At the end of this entry Evelyn mentions that he had made two earlier visits to Portsmouth many years before in 1638 and 1642 but of them he wrote no contemporary account which survives. Of the 1642 visit he says that it was made to see the siege of Portsmouth. He arrived 'on the day of its being render'd to Sir William Waler [the Parliamentary General] which gave me an opportunity of taking my leave of Coll: Goring the [Royalist] Governor now embarquing for France.'

Yet another notable visitor to Portsmouth before the end of the seventeenth century was that adventurous lady traveller, *Celia Fiennes*, who crossed over here after a visit to the Isle of Wight round about the year 1690. She was fortunate enough to have an easy crossing for she says:

'From Ride [Ryde] is 3 leagues to Portsmouth I pass'd it in an hour; Portsmouth is a very good town well built with Stone and Brick its not a large town, there are Walls and Gates about it and at least eight Bridges and Gates without one another with Ditches which secures it very strongly to the Landward; to the Sea the fortifications are not so strong, there is a plattform with Guns and Pallisadoes; there is a good dock for building shipps, but about 6 mile off at Burston [Bursledon] and Red bridge are the best shipps built; there are most of the great shipps lye at anchor here.

I was a board the *Royall Charles* and the *Royal James*[1] which are fine shipps the Roomes spacious for length and breadth but not high, there was a large Chappel and Cabbin with damaske furniture; the Castle[2] at Portsmouth is not great its rather called the Kings House where is a great deal of armes; I was in the Dineing Roome where King Charles the Second met Queen Katherine and was marryed to her and set the crown on her head; there from that roome out of double doores goes a long wooden bridge to the Plattforme; just by is South sea Castle which is wash'd round by the sea and pretty deep water att Spring tides, it looks very fine but think its but of little Strength or Service; above the town is a very fine down called Porchester Down very pleasant for Sports Hawking and Hunting.'

This visit would seem to have been of short duration but in the eighteenth century with the slow improvement in road travel there were considerably more visitors to Portsmouth and this is reflected in the increasing number of descriptions of the town that are to be found. At times they seem somewhat repetitive but nearly all pick out some aspects which are missed by others. However, most comment on the fact that Portsmouth is unusual in being a fortified town still with a military guard. Descriptions too of the view from Portsdown Hill tend to increase. Lieut. Hammond in 1635 had referred to it, but it is only now that it becomes a matter for lengthy report.

Quite the fullest and most detailed account is given by *Stephen Martin-Leake* who visited Portsmouth in October 1728 and again in January 1729 in the course of his duties when still a Clerk in the Navy Pay Office. Stephen Martin-Leake is better known as a member of the College of Arms, for only a few months after his visits to Portsmouth he became Norroy King of Arms and many years later Garter King of Arms.

On his first visit after describing in detail the places he passed through on his journey down he says:

'After this, coming to a ridge of hills called Portsdown, we had a fine prospect of the sea, the Isle of Wight, the channel between the island and the main leading to Southampton, and the whole harbour and town of Portsmouth at about five miles distance, which I beheld with more pleasure, as I was desirous to be at my journey's end. From the hills, by a descent of about a mile, we came to Portsea island, the channel that divides it from the mainland being no more than a broad ditch at low water. Here is a turnpike, and a bridge over to the island, with a small guard. From this extremity of the island to the other, where Portsmouth stands, is four miles by a very good road, all upon a flat, and not unpleasant, it being well cultivated and has some good farms upon it, and here and there a house of entertainment. To view Portsmouth from Portsdown, it seems to be in the very water, but when you come thither you are better reconciled to it. It was a new sight to me, and a pleasant one, for I love to see fortifications, and, according to the custom of fortified towns, there

[1] Name of *Royal James* was changed to *Victory* in 1691.
[2] God's House, the Governor's House, is here referred to.

By courtesy of the Portsmouth City Record Office.

The Landport Gate, c. 1717.

was a guard at the gate, who stopped the coach to know who was in it, which I thought ridiculous enough being a stage, and that they suffer horsemen to pass without examination. But of this more another time. I was glad to get my lodgings at Mrs. Watermans, where I have a good bed, a neat, clean room and furniture, and excellent provision, and there is a glass of as good French claret at the tavern for three shillings a bottle as ever I drank.'

On his second visit Martin-Leake reported to his unknown correspondent at much greater length:

'PORTSMOUTH, January 1728–9.

SIR, – We had a frozen journey hither, and made it three days, as they always do when they travel with money in the coach. Our guard was eight horse Grenadier Guards, with a subaltern officer. It snowed a great part of the way, and I think they had a bad time of it, for we could hardly keep ourselves warm with the glasses up; yet the officer would not let the troopers put on their cloaks, to inure them (I suppose) to bad weather and discipline. Two of them rode before the coach, the rest followed. Thus we travelled in state, and gave way to nothing.

We detached one of our troop before to bespeak our dinner, and the soldiers and the like at night to provide supper and accommodation; by this means we had everything ready in due time and order. I observed the troopers both noon and night constantly had a plum pudding, besides a good joint of meat, and upon these occasions they are welcome guests, because they pay like others for what they have, besides what we spend. I assure you we live well, and do something extraordinary upon acccount of the figure we travel in, and entertain the officer at our table. At night the money is kept in the guard-room, with the soldiers.

I am at my old lodgings at Mrs. Waterman's. As to business, we have only paid one ship at Spithead, and I believe shall do nothing else the short time we are like to continue here. I shall make the best use of that time to complete my account of Portsmouth, which you shall see when finished. I pace the works and take the angles as well as I can, without being taken notice of, in order to lay down a plan of the town and fortifications. The last time I was here I took a view of the town from the sea as well as I could in a boat.

I don't know anything to communicate but what you'll see in my description of the place, unless it be the early club at Piles' Coffee House, which, indeed, is something singular. We have, indeed, clubs enough in London that deserve that name, never parting till early in the morning, but this don't meet till that time, and they consist of some of the most sensible men in the place. One of them is a doctor of physic. Their hour is four in the morning, when they meet without disturbing the coffee people or their own families. The fire is laid in the coffee-room, and everything ready they may want over night. He that comes first lets himself in, strikes a light, lights the fire, and puts on the tea-kettle. When so many are met the coffee is made, and after spending an hour drinking coffee, reading the news, and talking politics, they separate. This club would by no means suit me, I could sooner be reconciled to a late than an early club; business or travelling makes it tolerable, I can then rise as well as others, but never by choice. It is neither pleasant nor wholesome to go abroad till the sun has blessed the earth and exhaled the vapours of the night. There is often the difference of summer and winter between the morning early and the noon of the same day, and sure no one can like such extremes. . . .

Portsmouth Town is not inconsiderable. It has two principal streets from east to west, from the land gate to the sea, besides some other smaller and a great many cross streets and alleys or lanes. The form is irregular, but nearest a square, having four sides, west to the sea, north to the harbour, south and east to the land. The buildings are tolerably good, but none remarkable. The Town Hall in the High-street is one of the best.[1] There is a large and commodious cooperage for use of the Navy, and handsome new barracks of brick, designed in the form of a half H,[2] but one wing is wanting to perfect it. The best house in the town is Mr. Ridge's, the brewer, and the only good one,[3] for the Governor's, though it be a large commodious old building, has but a mean appearance.

There is but one church in the town, a very old building, but it has a very good tower and chimes, and in the upper part is a room where a man lives to give notice of all ships that appear off the harbour, which he does by striking a bell as many times as there are ships. They have a good peal of eight bells, which were brought from the church in Dover Castle by the interest of Sir George Rooke, one of their members.[4] They are said to be the first ringers that struck their bells in slams (as they call it), that is, together at one stroke like a volley of muskets, which they do in the middle of a peal, as often as they please, without breaking off the peal; and this they do upon rejoicing days in imitation of huzzas or volleys.

Thursdays and Saturdays are their market days, where they have everything a plentiful country round about them can supply, and not a little is brought from the Isle of Wight; amongst other things they have excellent fish, and French claret at 3s. per bottle in the taverns.'

Martin-Leake then describes in very great detail the fortifications of the town of Portsmouth, and continues:

'The ditch of the town is clean, full of water, and in good order, except to the south, which is indeed very broad, but full of weeds, not being so well supplied with water as the other. The walls are of earth, in a very good condition, faced with stone at bottom a little above the water. The ramparts are in good order, and guns well mounted upon ship's carriages, for it is found by experience they do most service. The outworks are not taken so much care of, though they are not bad. But the counterscarp is wholly neglected.

The garrison in war is usually two regiments of foot, but in peace eight companies of invalids, making 400 men. Besides the main guard, which may consist of about thirty, with an officer, there is a guard at the Land Gate and a small one at the Mill Gate; sentinels upon the corner bastions, the

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[1] This is the original Town Hall built in 1539 and pulled down in 1739 as being ruinous.

[2] The cooperage in St. Nicholas Street was built in 1723. The new barracks mentioned cannot be identified with any certainty.

[3] This house was on the north side of High Street.

[4] MP for Portsmouth 1698-1705. Although Prince George of Denmark promised Rooke five bells from Dover Castle on 24 February 1703, they were not removed until 1779. In 1703 however, a peal of eight bells was made for St. Thomas's by Abraham Redhill (or Rudhall) of Gloucester.

platform, and at the Governor's house, but nowhere else, for there are none at the Water Gate nor Point Gate. Indeed, there is not much need at the latter, because it is within sight of the main guard at the west end of the High-street, and this guard is very well situated, as it commands the gate, the High-street, is near the magazine, the platform, and the Governor. Opposite to the Governor's house, which is open to the south and west, is a spacious area, or place of arms, taking up the south-west corner of the town, sufficient to draw up 2,000 or 3,000 men. It is now a good field, and serves the Governor's use, that is, the Deputy-Governor, for the Governor never resides there.

They observe the same order here as in other garrison towns. As soon as it is dusk a gun is fired from the platform, as a warning it is time to shut the Land Gate, whereupon the tattoo is beat round the town and in a moderate time after the Land Gate is shut; but the Water Gate is not shut till ten o'clock, and the Point Gate not till eleven, when notice is given by ringing a bell of the church. The invalids of the garrison have many of them little houses on the south and east sides next the wall, where they live with their families, the rest in the barracks.

Besides the town itself, there are considerable suburbs, and, first, the Point is more peculiarly so, and even a part of the town, for there is no coming at it by land but through the town. It makes one side of the harbour's mouth, and is defended by the Sally Port, which entirely covers it on that side, and is of a triangular form, the other two sides lying within the harbour. It has one good street through the middle, from the Point Gate to the water side, is full built, and very populous and thriving, being the Wapping of Portsmouth. Here the Johns carouse, not being confined to hours, and spend their money for the good of the public, which makes alehouses and shops thrive mightily upon this spot. Some have compared it to the Point at Jamaica that was swallowed by an earthquake, and think, if that was Sodom this is Gomorrah; but it is by no means so bad as some would make it, though bad enough.

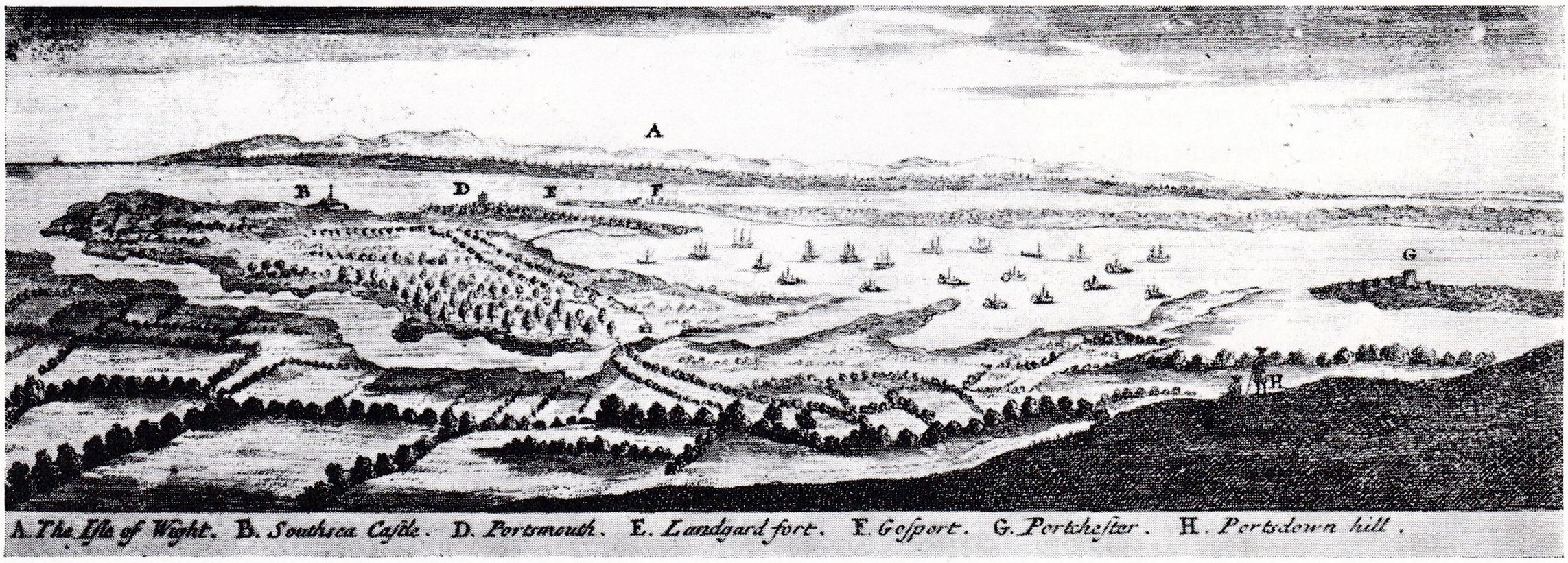
On the land side, eastward (for there is none to the south) a little way from the Land Gate, are very large suburbs extending to the dock, and joined by the Ordnance to the Mill Gate, all which taken together is much more than the whole town.[1] The Ordnance is a pretty neat place; it runs west into the harbour, just beyond the Mill Gate, flanking the covert way. Here they have a line of guns upon land carriages, which they fire upon rejoicing days, and hoist the Union flag upon a tall flagstaff. . . .

The Dockyard is a fine place, but I need not describe it, because it is like other yards which you are well acquainted with. I shall only observe of it that it is more compact than any other, and the docks are stone, which in others are wood. The officers' houses, I think, are better than any other, though not so pleasantly situated as those at Chatham, this being all flat; but the officers are greater men here than anywhere, for they are all Commissioners. The yard is walled in with a high wall. They have a chapel for the use of the yard,[2] and, I do assure you a good dock regiment. I saw them once perform an exercise very well, but if they are soldiers, what pretence the officers have to be captains I don't understand. If they could persuade the men to fight, I'm persuaded they could not fight themselves.

On the opposite side of the harbour is Gosport, a good town dependant upon the town and harbour of Portsmouth, and therefore may be esteemed a part of it, as in common speech it is taken to be. It is much the pleasanter side to live on, having a fine country adjoining which you are in as soon as you go out of the town; whereas from Portsmouth you must either cross the water, be confined to the Isle of Portsea, or ride five or six miles to come at a good country, which with as many, back, is as far as most people ride for pleasure. Gosport is likewise esteemed a better situation, and has good water in plenty, which Portsmouth wants. But, then, for company and agreeable living, Portsmouth is best. The garrison and corporation, the navy, ordnance and dockyard, and the company that is brought thither by business or curiosity, besides what the sea brings, naval or mercantile, makes as much difference almost between Portsmouth and Gosport as between town and country. Here are two good coffee-houses, good taverns, and the fold of business; there you have provisions something cheaper, and some, indeed, prefer the air of Gosport; but they are so near akin I see no reason for it, because it is found by experience that Portsmouth is as healthy as most places, notwithstanding its situation, which from Portsdown appears to be much worse than it really is. For my part I never was better anywhere.'

[1] Portsea, built on Portsmouth Common, close to the Dockyard.
[2] St Anne's Church built 1703-4.

By courtesy of Portsmouth City Museums.



Prospect of Portsmouth, 1723.

Martin-Leake ends by discussing the strength and weakness of all the various fortifications, including Southsea Castle, and shows how an enemy could attack Portsmouth with some hope of success.

After this *Daniel Defoe's* description, made as a result of his visit in 1724, seems insignificant but his evaluation of the defences of Portsmouth is clear and concise.

'The situation of this place is such, that it is chosen, as may well be said, for the best security to the navy above all the places in Britain; the entrance into the harbour is safe, but very narrow, guarded on both sides by terrible platforms of cannon, particularly on the Point; which is a suburb of Portsmouth properly so call'd, where there is a brick platform built with two tire of guns, one over another, and which can fire so in cover, that the gunners cannot be beaten from their guns, or their guns easily dismounted; the other is from the point of land on the side of Gosport, which they call Gilkicker, where also they have two batteries.

Before any ships attempt to enter this port by sea, they must also pass the cannon of the main platform of the garrison, and also another at South-Sea-Castle; so that it is next to impossible that any ships could match the force of all those cannon, and be able to force their way into the harbour . . . The mouth or entrance into Portsmouth is narrow, and may be lock'd up with booms, which before the ships could break, and while they were lying at them to break them away, they would be torn in pieces by the battery at the Point . . .

As to the strength of the town by land, the works are very large and numerous, and besides the battery at the Point aforesaid, there is a large hornwork on the south-side, running out towards South-Sea Castle; there is also a good counterscarp, and double mote, with ravelins in the ditch, and double pallisadoes, and advanc'd works to cover the place from any approach, where it may be practicable: The strength of the town is also considerably augmented on the land-side, by the fortifications raised in King William's time about the docks and yards, which are now perfected, and those parts made a particular strength by themselves; and tho' they are indeed in some sense independent one of another, yet they cover and strengthen one another, so as that they cannot be separately attack'd on that side, while they are both in the same hands.

These docks and yards are now like a town by themselves, and are a kind of marine corporation, or a government of their own kind within themselves; there being particular large rows of dwellings, built at the publick charge, within the new works, for all the principal officers of the place; especially the commissioner, the agent of the victualling, and such as these; the tradesmen likewise have houses here, and many of the labourers are allow'd to live in the bounds as they can get lodging.

The town of Portsmouth, besides its being a fortification, is a well inhabited, thriving, prosperous corporation; and hath been greatly enrich'd

of late by the fleet's having so often and so long lain there, as well as large fleets of merchant-men, as the whole navy during the late war; besides the constant fitting out of men here, and the often paying them at Portsmouth, has made a great confluence of people thither on their private business, with other things, which the attendance of those fleets hath requir'd: These things have not only been a great advantage to the town, but has really made the whole place rich, and the inhabitants of Portsmouth are quite another sort of people than they were a few years before the Revolution; this is what Mr. Cambden takes notice of, even so long ago as the reign of Queen Elizabeth . . .

The government of the place is by a mayor and aldermen, &c. as in other corporations, and the civil government is no more interrupted by the military, than if there was no garrison there, such is the good conduct of the governors, and such it has always been, since our soveraigns have ceas'd to encourage the soldiery to insult the civil magistrates: . . . The inhabitants indeed necessarily submit to such things as are the consequence of a garrison town, such as being examin'd at the gates, such as being obliged to keep garrison hours, and not be let out, or let in after nine a clock at night, and the like; but these are things no people will count a burthen, where they get their bread by the very situation of the place, as is the case here.

Since the encrease of business at this place, by the long continuance of the war, the confluence of people has been so great, and the town not admitting any enlargement for buildings, that a kind of a suburb, or rather a new town has been built on the healthy ground adjoining to the town,[1] which is so well built, and seems to encrease so fast, that in time it threatens to outdo for numbers of inhabitants, and beauty of buildings, even the town it self; and particularly by being unconfin'd by the laws of the garrison, as above . . .

From Portsmouth west, the country lyes low and flat, and is full of creeks and inlets of the sea and rivers, all the way to Southampton, so that we ferry over three times in about eighteen miles; besides going over one bridge, namely, at Tichfield: The first of these ferries is that at Portsmouth it self, (viz.) cross the mouth of the harbour, from the Point above-mention'd to Gosport; from thence we ride to Tichfield.'

After these more formal accounts, the youthful enthusiasm of the fifteen-year-old third son of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, *Joseph Yorke*, comes as a pleasant change. He wrote in August 1739 to his sister Elizabeth.

'Since we came to this place by Papa's kindness we have spent the last week the most pleasant I ever did in any holy days. He was so kind as to take my brothers and me with him to Portsmouth and thinking it would not be disagreeable to you to hear how we were entertained, tho' I believe from my description you will hardly conceive any idea of it, nevertheless I shall venture to send as good an account of it as I can.

On Tuesday, August 21st, we set out from Carshalton about 8 o'clock and had a most delightful journey over the Downs to Guildford, where we dined, and afterwards continued our journey over a country far different from that in the morning; for instead of fine seats, corn fields, sheep and grass, we could see nothing but a few straggling cottages, and a barren sandy desert, over which we continued our journey to Liphook, where we lay; and the next morning, being August 22nd, we set out by seven and went on upon our journey. When we were got about a mile from Liphook, the wind rose and it rained very hard, so that we could not see 20 yards before us, which, added to the barrenness of the country, made a very dismal appearance. We continued thus till we came to Petersfield, when the weather began to mend, and passing the forest of Bear we came at last to some Downs about 3 miles from Portsmouth where, from the top of the hill, we had a very fine view of the sea, the town, Port-Chester and the Isle of Wight. We arrived at Portsmouth about 12 o'clock. The entrance is thro' 2 gates and over 2 draw-bridges, it being a fortified town, and fortified both to the sea and land. We got a dinner at the Inn where Admiral Cavendish, Mr Hughes, Commissioner of the Dock, Capt. Griffin, Captain of the Admiral's ship, Capt. Smith, who is a Dover man, and Dr Brady, at whose house we lay, din'd with us. Before dinner the Mayor and Corporation presented Papa with the freedom of the Town, and after we had din'd, we drank tea at the Admiral's, and then proceeded to the Dock-yard where we saw all the stores for the ships; first the masts of all sizes, the next thing was the rope walk, which is a room of 340 yards long so that when you are at one end the men at the other look like boys. There they make the ropes which at first are no thicker than

[1] Portsea, built on Portsmouth Common, close to the Dockyard.

pack thread, but many being twisted together make rope which at last produce vast cables. We afterwards saw the place where they make the sails and flags and then went on board a new ship called the *St George* of 90 guns, which is reckoned one of the best ships that was ever built, but is not yet launched, not being quite finished. We then proceeded to the Academy, erected at the expense of the Crown, and is a very good, strong, plain building. Here the masters attended us and shew'd the boys' drawings, and the orrery, which is the best that was ever made. We then went to the Commissioners and were refresh'd with wine; and having sat about half an hour, we went to the Admiral's, where there was a very elegant supper provided for us, and about half an hour after ten we retired to Dr Brady's where we lay. The next morning, August 23rd, was very cloudy and a brisk wind. After breakfast we went on board the Commissioner's yacht and were received with a salute of 6 guns. Having weighed anchor, we proceeded on our voyage to Spithead, about 3 miles off Portsmouth, where the Admiral's ship and 2 other men of war lay. The wind and tide being against us, and the sea a little rough, gave us an opportunity of seeing more of the manner of sailing than we should otherwise have done. To confess the truth, I never was more, nor indeed so much, pleased with anything I ever saw before tho' mixed with bitter; for being but a fresh water sailor, I was a little sick; but by the help of a little rum on board the Admiral I soon recovered. When we drew near the ship, what with the sounding of the drums and trumpets, the men all in their stations on the ropes and the ship in her best dress, I think I never beheld a more cheerful and pleasing spectacle. We then walked over the ship and saw all the ammunition, provision, etc. It is surprising to reflect how so small a fabric should contain so many men and provision for them for so long a time, and one is amazed to see what regularity and order (tho' quite necessary) is kept thro' the whole ship. We were entertained in the Admiral's cabin (which is a large and handsome room) with cake, sea-biscuit and wine. After some stay there we went into the Admiral's barge, which was row'd by 12 men in clean white shirts and caps of the Admiral's livery. When we were got a little way from the ship, the sailors again took their stations on the ropes, or to speak like a sailor, manned the ship, and gave us three huzza's accompanied with a salute of 17 guns, the former of which was answered from the barge. We were but 20 minutes rowing back, tho' we had been an hour and three quarters sailing to the ship in the yacht. When we came on shore we dress'd and din'd at the Admiral's, where we had a very handsome dinner of nine and eleven; and afterwards we saw the gun-wharf and all the military stores, such as, bombs, hand-grenades, chain-shots etc. and all the furniture and rigging of a fireship, which is indeed a very wonderful, as well as a dreadful sight. We then walked round the fortifications which are the more curious, Portsmouth being the only regular fortification in England. We supped at the Commissioners and the next morning set out for Carshalton, where on Saturday we arrived to dinner in high spirits and good health.'

Dr. Richard Pococke is the next visitor who left some account of Portsmouth. He was born in Southampton and later became a bishop in Ireland. In the course of his wide travels he came to Portsmouth in September 1754. He spent little more than a day in the town but would appear to have been very observant. He not only refers to the recent extensions to the town's fortifications at Fort Cumberland and the new works under construction near Portsbridge, but is the first to mention that people were beginning to use the town as a resort for sea bathing. The fact, too, that he speaks of the water-supply would indicate that it was becoming a matter of some concern in a town whose population was increasing very rapidly.

On his approach over Portsdown Hill, Pococke has this to say:

'To the east of the [Isle of Portsea] is a harbour called Langston Haven; there is a fort to defend it lately built[1] and there are works to defend the entrance of the island. . . . The eastern entrance of [Portsmouth] harbour is defended by South Sea Castle, built by Henry VIII., and on Gosport side by four forts and a platform of twenty canons. It is a fine harbour, and extends almost as far as Porchester, and it's said will hold a thousand men of war. In the church is a monument for the Duke of Buckingham, who was assassinated here by Felton in the time of K. Charles I . . . The Governor has a handsom house and chapel in the town, and there is a large brewhouse, bakehouse, and copperidge for the Dock, and barracks for the invalids who are here in garrison. The town of late has been resorted to for batheing and drinking the sea water, and they have made a very handsome bathing-house of wood, at a great expence, with

[1] Built in 1747.

Royal Naval Academy, Portsmouth.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Museums.

separate baths and apartments for men and women.[1] Tho' there is a chapel in the Dock, yet they have built another near it[2] for the large suburb, which is made by the workmen of the Dock, who pay a chaplain to officiate; and near it is a handsom musick room for a weekly concert, chiefly performed by gentlemen. They are supplyed with water from pumps about half a mile out of town, which is brought in hogsheads and never fails; they have a well also in the Dock at which the ships water. The great curiosity of this place is the Dock, where first we saw the gun wharf, in which are two Chinese Pagods seven feet high, with the heads of lyons, as on a sort of pillar, all of one piece of grey granite, brought by Commodore Anson and placed here.

Most of the Docks are lined with Portland stone, and are staunch'd with clay brought from Estamsay near.[3] They have from 1,000 to 1,500 men employed in the yard; it is curious to see them go out at the toll of a bell at noon and night, when every one may take out any useless pieces of wood and chips, as much as they can carry under the arm, and small chips in bags, which are examined with a wooden crow, and all of them observed to see that they do not take out any iron, or anything valuable. It is curious also to see the forges where they make the anchors; the largest weigh about 80 hundred weight, that is four tons, which are work'd with machines to move them. The ropeyard is 102 fathoms in length; they joyn three lengths to make the longest cable, which is 306 fathoms, and 23 inches round, consequently about eight inches in diameter, consists of 3,000 threds, and weighs five tons. The main-yard of a first rate man-of-war is $23\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter and 33 long, and the bowsprit is 36 inches in diameter, and the mainmast 38 . . . The Academy is a handsom building for fifty youths to be instructed in the theory and practice of Navigation, where they are lodged, dieted, and wear the sea officers uniform, blue turn'd up with white; here they remain three years, and then are made midshipmen; and this, or serving under captains of men-of-war three years, is the only way of being advanced in the Navy. They go out once a week and work a yatch, which is full rigg'd as a man-of-war, in order to be well versed in the practice. In the Academy they have a fine orrery which cost £200, and a model of a first rate man of war rig'd. Tho' they have several advantages in education, yet they cannot live here under £50 or £60 a year, and those who cannot afford it send their sons into the Navy in the other way . . . On the Gosport side is lately built of brick part of a

[1] In Bath Square near Point, now known as Quebec House.
[2] St. George's church, built between 1753-54.
[3] Stamshaw.

very noble hospital for the sick and wounded sailors,[1] it is to make four sides of a square court, one of which only as yet is finished, which is 574 long and 100 deep . . . It consists of four floors above ground and one under ground for certain offices, but what is most curious, the whole is built on arches in such manner that the highest tyde does not come to the top of them, and there are passages by the galleries under the arches . . . so that the tide comes in and out without being any way offensive to the buildings or apartments. It is divided into several wards, with many beds in them, as other hospitals, and there is a kitchen at each end.

From Portsmouth I went by water on the 24th to Portchester, situated on the north-west part of the harbour and to the east of the river which comes from Fareham . . . It is now an enclosure about a furlong square encompassed with a wall, and tho' very little if any part of the wall be so old as the time of the Romans, yet one sees much Roman brick in it. At the north-west corner are large remains of a castle of a more modern date than the walls.'

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, also first visited Portsmouth about this time. The entries in his *Journal* are always brief and reflect the busy life he led, for he travelled on an average 4,500 miles a year round the British Isles throughout his ministry, generally giving about two sermons a day. On his first visit to Portsmouth in 1753 he says:

'I was surprised to find so little fruit here, after so much preaching. That accursed itch of disputing had well nigh destroyed all the seed which had been sown. And this vain jangling they called contending for the faith! I doubt the whole faith of these poor wretches is but an opinion.

After a little rest we took a walk round the town, which is regularly fortified . . . Gosport, Portsmouth, and the Common, (which is now all turned into streets) may probably contain half as many people as Bristol: and so civil a people I never saw before in any sea-port town in England.

I preached at half an hour after six, in an open part of the Common, adjoining to the new church [St George's]. The congregation was large and well-behaved: not one scoffer did I see, nor one trifler.'

This is in sharp contrast to *General James Wolfe's* opinion of the people of Portsmouth, for in 1758 prior to his setting out for Canada he wrote to his mother: 'The necessity of living in the midst of the diabolical citizens of Portsmouth is a real and unavoidable calamity. It is a doubt to me if there is such another collection of demons upon the whole earth. Vice, however, wears so ugly a garb that it disgusts rather than tempts.'

John Wesley, however, was to return again and again to Portsmouth and from 1767 until a few months before his death in 1791 he made almost annual visits, generally in October. On almost all occasions he speaks well of the congregations he meets in Portsmouth. Frequently he crossed over to the Isle of Wight afterwards and by no means always did he have an easy passage. This entry of 1758 is typical: 'I designed to go in a wherry to the Isle of Wight; but the watermen were so extravagant in their demands, that I changed my mind and went in the hoy; and it was well I did, for the sea was so high, it would not have been easy for a small boat to keep above water.'

About most of his visits Wesley generally made little comment beyond that he came and preached, but on one occasion in 1779 he said, 'I took a view of the camp adjoining to the town, and wondered to find it as clean and neat as a gentleman's garden. But there was no Chaplain! The English soldiers of this age have nothing to do with God!' Only once did Wesley make time to walk round the Dockyard. This was in October 1770, not long after the great fire there which had broken out in the previous July.

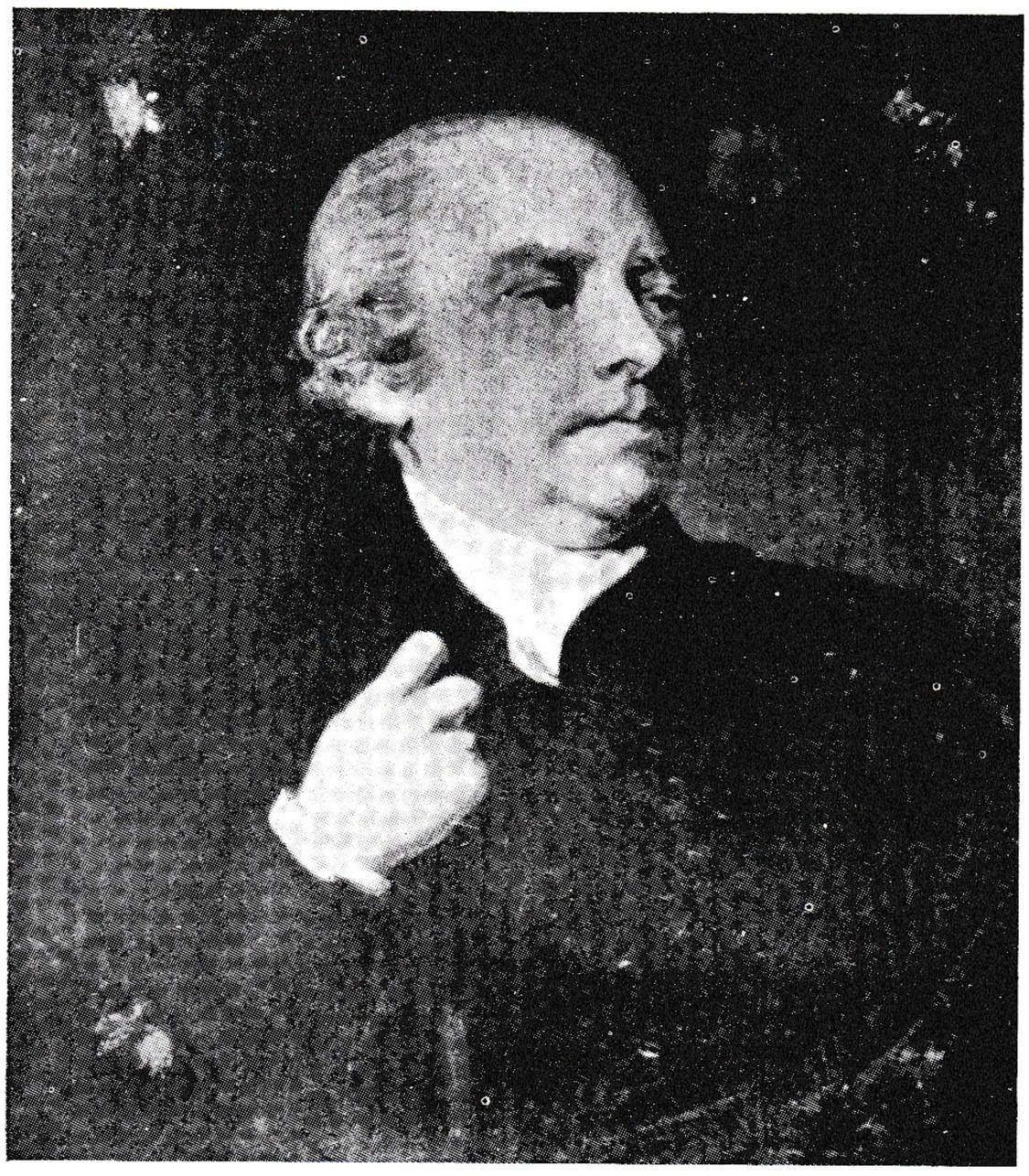
'I walked round the Dock, much larger than any other in England. The late fire began in a place where no one comes, just at low water, and at a time when all were fast alseep; so that none can doubt its being done by design. It spread with such amazing violence, among tow and cordage, and dry wood, that none could come near without the utmost danger; nor was any thing expected, but that the whole Dock would be consumed, if not the town also; but this God would not permit. It stopped on one side, close to the Commissioner's house; and just as it was seizing the town on the other side, the wind changed and drove it back. Afterwards the fury of it was checked by water, by sand, and by pulling down some buildings; and yet it was full five weeks before it was wholly put out.'

Wesley's last visit to Portsmouth was in October 1790 when he travelled here from Newport in the Isle of Wight.

'We purposed to return to Portsmouth (about twenty miles, it being a calm, sunshiny morning)

[1] Haslar Hospital, built between 1746-1762.

By courtesy of the Carlisle Public Libraries.



The Rev. William Gilpin in 1781. After the portrait by Henry Walton.

in the wherry we came; but a friend offering us a kind of hoy, we willingly accepted his offer. It was well he did; for as soon as we were out of the harbour, the wind rose, and the sea raged horribly; the wherry would soon have been swallowed up: the waves washed over us on both sides; having no decks, we were well soaked from head to foot, but before noon we got safe to Portsmouth.

It is interesting to note that a fortnight after this stormy voyage the *Journal* comes to an end. Wesley was then aged 87 and one cannot help but think that this trip proved just too much for him. It was probably the beginning of the end for he died six months later.

John Wesley may have described well what a journey to the Isle of Wight was like, but it is *J. Hassell*, who in 1790 made a similar journey to the island, who gives a far better idea of the state of the roads in this area at that time. 'The whole of the road from Southwick to Ports-down Hill, which was now the spot to which we bent our course, is composed of flint stones by which our horses' legs were much cut . . . The soil of the hill consists of a chalky surface, with a bed of flint underneath; and where cultivated is very productive.' This is probably one of his few truly accurate statements in an otherwise very fulsome account.

A far better description is given by *Rev. William Gilpin*, the New Forest clergyman, who made a tour of Hampshire, Sussex and Kent in 1774. He is the first to give a really full description of the view from Portsdown Hill.

'From the top of Portsdown-hill, where we soon arrived, we had a view grander in its kind than perhaps any part of the globe can exhibit. Beneath our feet lay a large extent of marshy ground, which is covered with water when the tides flow high, and adorned with innumerable islands and peninsulas. About a mile from the eye, this marsh is joined by the island of Portsea, distinguished by its peculiar fertility, and the luxuriance of its woods; amoung which the town of Portsmouth appears to rise at the distance of five miles. The island is nearly of a triangular form: but here it seems to be a long stretch of land, forming a boundary to the harbour, which, like a land-locked bay, runs up between it and the marshy grounds we had just surveyed. Far to the right, and at the very end of the harbour, stands Porchester-castle; the massy towers of which shewed themselves to advantage at this distance. The harbour of Portsmouth, which would contain all the shipping in Europe, was the grand feature in this view. Besides innumerable skiffs and smaller vessels plying about this ample bason, we counted between fifty and sixty sail of the line. Some of them appeared lying unrigged on the water; others in commission with their colours flying. Beyond Portsmouth we had a view of the sea, which is generally crowded with ships, especially the road of St. Helen's, where some men of war are commonly waiting for the wind. Beyond all appeared the isle of Wight; the high grounds of which bounded the prospect . . .

Having surveyed this extensive landscape, we descended the hill, and soon entered the isle of Portsea, through a small fortification. The sea at full tide flows into the ditches that surround it, and just brings it within the definition of an island. The whole is a perfect flat, but the road winding through luxuriant inclosures, and shaded by noble oaks, is agreeable. In this island we travelled about four miles to Portsmouth . . .

Portsmouth, with all its gates, ditches, bastions,

Eighteenth-century warships in Portsmouth Harbour.
By courtesy of Portsmouth City Museums.

batteries, and other works, is a new sight to a traveller, who has never seen a fortified town or a naval arsenal. The bakery, salting-houses, and other victualling offices would appear enormous, if we had not a counterpart in the many floating castles, and towns lying ready in the harbour to receive their contents . . .

One of the great deficiencies of Portsmouth is the want of water. There are springs in different parts of the harbour, but not being collected into a head, they are inconvenient. The garrison is particularly ill supplied. This set an adventurous tradesman who lived at the Point, as it is called, to dig near his house in quest of water. At the depth of sixty feet he found a muddy bottom, and dug up an antique anchor. But no water appeared. He still went on. At the depth of twenty feet more he came to sand, and found symptoms of water. But instead of digging farther he tried an experiment. He bored a large pile, and drove it deep into the earth, through the sandy stratum that he had found. As soon as the pile touched the main spring, the water gushed so plentifully through it, as even to fill the well to the brim, and to run over. This, however, was only the first ebullition of the water. It soon sank; but continued to stand at the height of eight or nine feet from the surface, which gave a depth of seventy feet of good water in the well. . . .

But the great curiosity here is the harbour and all its appendages . . . It is a bay running many miles into the land, and opening to the sea by a narrow channel, only three hundred yards across, through which ships of war of the third and fourth rates may pass even at low water; and ships of the largest size when the tide is half made. On one side of this bay stand the town and fortifications of Portsmouth; on the other the town of Gosport, a hospital, and a fort. Through this channel the tide ebbs with so much force, that a small ship may get out, even when the wind blows directly against her. She sets her sails to keep her steady, and glides out with the retiring waters. This ample harbour is so land-locked on every side, that the wind must be very high, to give even the least motion to the larger ships which anchor in it. We were on board the *Britannia*, a first rate, which lay like a castle on the water, though there was both a current and a considerable wind. An officer on board informed us, that he had rarely known the harbour so agitated, as to put her into the least motion.

It filled the mind with pleasing ideas of the grandeur of Britain to sail up this noble bay . . .

I cannot, however, forbear making a few remarks on the ornamental part of our naval architecture. In sailing round the ships in Portsmouth harbour, we scarce observed one which was not superbly decorated with carving and painting. The impropriety and deformity of these ornaments, I think,

are great. The impropriety of them consists in decorating a machine with carved work, which is professedly intended to be battered with cannon-bullets. The absurdity is so common that it is not obvious: but if we should see the face of a bastion, adorned, at great expence, with figures in bas-relief, it would be glaring . . .

But, on a supposition there were no impropriety in these ornaments, the deformity still remains. It cannot be supposed the carving of these rough machines should be excellent: but if carving be at all thought necessary, it should, at least not be execrable. A vile ornament is surely a deformity: and most of the ornaments, we saw, were not only vile in themselves, but rendered doubly so by daubing them over with glaring colours. To a lion at the head of a British ship of war I should not much object, provided the form of a lion, however roughly executed, was in some little degree observed: and if instead of being daubed over with red or yellow, he was tinged with a darker colour, inclining only to yellow, so as to unite him better with the ship to which he was affixed . . .

It is probable, however, that among the vast society of naval architects, the body of carvers have their friends to support their interest. Otherwise they seem to be so useless a tribe, that the nation might well be exonerated from the expence they occasion. To take their bread from them would be hard; but such ingenious artists could turn their hands, no doubt, to the hewing of timber in some more useful manner.

When the board of Admiralty contracts for a ship of war, they give the form and size, I am told, of every piece of timber that belongs to her. But, for the credit of national taste, they leave the ornamental part in the hands of the carpenter. With how little judgement (taste is a word not to be used) these naval sculptors are endowed.'

After this what more can be said?

Many other visitors followed Gilpin to Portsmouth and some have left their comments, some of praise and some not, but few can really be said to reveal the character of the local inhabitants. Perhaps the passing visitors never really got to know them.

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